

Helicopter App?

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By

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About half of the students who fail to graduate college in six years never even make it to their second year, according to Department of Education data. Now, a new app is aiming to help make that college transition more successful for students — by involving their parents.

Launched this fall by a team based in Washington, [csMentor](#) — the “cs” stands for “college survival and success” — is a web-based program that combines video mentoring with regular check-ins to promote better communication between students and parents.

When families sign up for the program and pay the monthly \$29.95 subscription fee, the student gets access to a series of Mentoring Interactive Programs, or MIPs, which can be accessed online or from a mobile phone. Each MIP consists of a short video on a topic such as "Coping With Homesickness" or "How to Ask for Help in College." At the end of each MIP, students are asked a series of multiple-choice questions about their health, social adjustment, academic behavior and academic goals.

After the student completes the week’s 10 multiple-choice questions, the data are analyzed by the csMentor technology and a report is generated for the student and the parents. The report doesn’t list the students’ answers, but instead provides a summary of how the student is doing in the four key areas, each of which is coded green, yellow or red.

“We see the service as a way of enhancing communication between parent and students,” said Steve Wattenmaker, CEO of csMentor. “We think it will enrich the conversations. It can go beyond the typical, ‘How’s everything this week?’ ”

Wattenmaker and the rest of the csMentor team, which is made up of educational psychologists, counselors and university administrators, hope the program will help students and parents spot potential problems earlier, so they can deal with them before they escalate.

But Marjorie Savage, parent program director at the University of Minnesota and author of the book *You're on Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me)*, wonders if parents should be involved so early in the problem-solving process.

“It feels to me like it’s going further than what a typical college student should need,” Savage said. “There’s a level of trust that parents need to be giving to their students at this point, and is this allowing that to happen? If the student is getting that information, it seems to me like that should be sufficient. For parents to be monitoring that closely is going beyond what’s desirable.”

Savage believes the red, yellow and green flags could be useful information for students, but she thinks it is up to them to decide when and how to talk to their parents about it. In the meantime, she said, colleges and universities should do their part to inform students and parents of the

services available on campus, so students can figure out where to turn and parents can rest assured that their child has support.

Lewis & Clark College President Barry Glassner, who recently co-authored an [op-ed](#) about “helicopter parenting,” said parents can take a proactive role in urging their student to take advantage of campus resources. He argues that parents cannot really be overinvolved, but they can be involved in the wrong ways.

“I certainly see parents who are not involved in ways that are as constructive as they could be,” Glassner said.

This is the issue csMentor aims to address. According to Wattenmaker, the goal is not to change the quantity of communication, but to change the quality. “We think that parents who are either appropriately active in college students’ lives or over-active or under-active are going to be that way no matter what,” he said. “We think our role is to inform those interactions that are going to take place under any circumstances.”

Already, that is exactly what the program is doing for staff and students at the College Success Foundation in D.C. With a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the College Success Foundation, which helps low-income students apply to and graduate from college, has enrolled 90 students in the csMentor program free of charge.

“Getting through the first year and transitioning to the second year is critical for student success in college,” said Monica Gray, director of programs. “The csMentor program gives us that additional information that students won’t always give us.”

The College Success Foundation has set up the program so that its staff, rather than the parents, receives the students’ reports. The staff members looking at the reports are the same people who are in touch with the students on a regular basis, but now they can skip the general questions and get straight to the point.

“We’re able to have more meaningful conversations with the students because we can target more specific areas, said Senior College Programs Officer Kya Dixon. “If we know that their social development is going well but they have a red flag in academics, we can talk about connecting with tutoring services or going to office hours, instead of trying to cover everything in one conversation.”

Read more: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/08/29/new-app-updates-parents-their-students-progress#ixzz24wTZAL1>
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